

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO
WESTERN DIVISION AT CINCINNATI**

JOHN WESLEY SLAGLE,

Petitioner,

-vs-

MICHELE MILLER, Warden,
Belmont Correctional Institution,

Respondent.

:

Case No. 1:12-cv-839

:

Chief Judge Susan J. Dlott
Magistrate Judge Michael R. Merz

DECISION AND ORDER DENYING MOTION FOR DISCOVERY

This habeas corpus action is before the Court on Petitioner's Motion for Discovery attached to his Motion for Leave to Proceed *in forma pauperis* (Doc. No. 1).

A habeas petitioner is not entitled to discovery as a matter of course, but only upon a fact-specific showing of good cause and in the Court's exercise of discretion. Rule 6(a), Rules Governing §2254 Cases; *Bracy v. Gramley*, 520 U.S. 899 (1997); *Harris v. Nelson*, 394 U.S. 286 (1969); *Byrd v. Collins*, 209 F.3d 486, 515-16 (6th Cir. 2000). Before determining whether discovery is warranted, the Court must first identify the essential elements of the claim on which discovery is sought. *Bracy*, 520 U.S. at 904, citing *United States v. Armstrong*, 517 U.S. 456, 468 (1996). The burden of demonstrating the materiality of the information requested is on the moving party. *Stanford v. Parker*, 266 F.3d 442, 460 (6th Cir. 2001), *cert. denied*, 537 U.S. 831 (2002), citing *Murphy v. Johnson*, 205 F. 3rd 809, 813-15 (5th Cir. 2000). "Even in a death penalty case, 'bald assertions and conclusory allegations do not provide sufficient ground to warrant requiring the state to respond to discovery or require an evidentiary hearing.'" *Bowling*

v. Parker, 344 F.3d 487, 512 (6th Cir. 2003), *cert. denied*, 543 U.S. 842 (2004), *quoting Stanford*, 266 F.3d at 460.

Rule 6 does not "sanction fishing expeditions based on a petitioner's conclusory allegations." *Williams v. Bagley*, 380 F.3d 932, 974, (6th Cir. 2004), *cert. denied*, 544 U.S. 1003 (2005), *citing Rector v. Johnson*, 120 F.3d 551, 562 (5th Cir. 1997); *see also Stanford*, 266 F.3d at 460. "Conclusory allegations are not enough to warrant discovery under [Rule 6]; the petitioner must set forth specific allegations of fact." *Williams*, 380 F.3d at 974, *citing Ward v. Whitley*, 21 F.3d 1355, 1367 (5th Cir. 1994).

In conducting the analysis that led to granting discovery in *Bracy v. Gramley*, *supra*, the Supreme Court provided at least part of the template which lower courts should follow in deciding discovery motions in habeas corpus cases.

First of all, it identified the claims to which the sought discovery in that case related and specifically determined whether they were claims upon which habeas corpus relief could be granted at all. Federal habeas corpus is, of course, available only to correct wrongs of constitutional dimension. 28 U.S.C. §2254(a); *Smith v. Phillips*, 455 U.S. 209 (1982), *Barclay v. Florida*, 463 U.S. 939 (1983). In *Bracy* the claim was that the trial judge was biased in favor of other defendants who had bribed him and therefore had a motive to be harsh with those, like the petitioner, who had not. The Supreme Court distinguished this kind of claim of judicial disqualification from other non-constitutional claims which would not be cognizable in habeas corpus. This part of the *Bracy* analysis makes it clear that discovery should not be authorized on allegations in a habeas corpus petition which do not state a claim upon which habeas corpus relief can be granted.

Secondly, the Supreme Court identified circumstances which corroborated *Bracy's* theory

of relief and request for discovery:

As just noted above, petitioner's attorney at trial was a former associate of Maloney's, App. 51, and Maloney [the corrupt trial judge] appointed him to defend this case in June 1981. The lawyer announced that he was ready for trial just a few weeks later. He did not request additional time to prepare penalty-phase evidence in this death penalty case even when the State announced at the outset that, if petitioner were convicted, it would introduce petitioner's then-pending Arizona murder charges as evidence in aggravation. Tr. of Oral Arg. 43. At oral argument before this Court, counsel for petitioner suggested, given that at least one of Maloney's former law associates--Robert McGee--was corrupt and involved in bribery, see *supra*, at 8, that petitioner's trial lawyer might have been appointed with the understanding that he would not object to, or interfere with, a prompt trial, so that petitioner's case could be tried before, and camouflage the bribe negotiations in, the Chow murder case. Tr. of Oral Arg. 17-18, 43-44. [FN11] This is, of course, only a theory at this point; it is not supported by any solid evidence of petitioner's trial lawyer's participation in any such plan. It is true, however, that McGee was corrupt and that petitioner's trial coincided with bribe negotiations in the Chow case and closely followed the Rosario murder case, which was also fixed.

520 U.S. 907-908.

We emphasize, though, that petitioner supports his discovery request by pointing not only to Maloney's conviction for bribe taking in other cases, but also to additional evidence, discussed above, that lends support to his claim that Maloney was actually biased in petitioner's own case. That is, he presents "specific allegations" that his trial attorney, a former associate of Maloney's in a law practice that was familiar and comfortable with corruption, may have agreed to take this capital case to trial quickly so that petitioner's conviction would deflect any suspicion the rigged Rosario and Chow cases might attract.

Id. at 909. The quoted "specific allegations" language is from *Harris v. Nelson*, *supra*, and demonstrates that the Supreme Court in both cases was advertent not to the **claim** language in the habeas petition, but to specific **evidence** obtained outside the discovery process and presented in support of a motion for discovery, which corroborates the claimed constitutional

violation.

Other parts of habeas corpus procedural jurisprudence, although not relevant to the particular decisions in *Harris* and *Bracy*, also should inform the a district court's exercise of its discretion in granting discovery under Habeas Rule 6. The purpose of discovery in any case is ultimately to gather evidence which will be put before the court in deciding the case on the merits. In order to obtain an evidentiary hearing in federal court on a claim on which he has not fully developed the factual basis in state court, a habeas corpus petitioner must show cause and prejudice under *Wainwright v. Sykes*, 433 U.S. 72 (1977). *Keeney v. Tamayo-Reyes*, 504 U.S. 1 (1992). Logically, there is no good reason to gather evidence which one will not be permitted to present because one cannot satisfy the *Keeney* standard. Therefore, if there are items of evidence sought in discovery which could have been obtained and presented during the state court process but were not, a petitioner should make the required *Keeney* showing before being authorized to conduct discovery to obtain the evidence.

Id., pp. 5-7.

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Turner v. Hudson, Case No. 2:07-cv-595 (Decision and Order Granting in Part and Denying in Part Petitioner's Motion for Discovery, July 11, 2008).

Petitioner's Motion for Discovery is completely "in blank." It does not indicate what

evidence is sought to be gathered from what persons by what methods. Petitioner's Motion for Discovery is DENIED without prejudice to its renewal in a form which complies with the standards set forth above.

October 31, 2012.

s/ *Michael R. Merz*
United States Magistrate Judge